




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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ELECTRICITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION (BATTERIES AND PREMIUM FEED-IN TARIFF) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (5.24 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Electricity and Other Legislation (Batteries and Premium Feed-in Tariff) Amendment Bill 2018. I would like to make some general observations about this bill from the point of view of the LNP. The LNP members support the amendments contained in the bill, but we stress that it is only on the basis that the bill will help protect the state from further cost blowouts by addressing areas of ambiguity within the Solar Bonus Scheme and giving certainty to scheme customers who may wish to install new or additional generation storage technology.

When the Solar Bonus Scheme was introduced in 2008, we expressed our concern that it was done so without a full appreciation of the long-term financial consequences it would mean for the state and the subsequent economic impact that the new solar photovoltaic systems and storage devices would have on the scheme over the years. The LNP members are of the view that, by clarifying how customers can invest in new technology without affecting their Solar Bonus Scheme eligibility and by setting clear boundaries around what is permissible, the bill gives sufficient regard to the rights of individuals. It also preserves the rights of individuals who have already made investments to upgrade their systems and that is a good thing.

The LNP members welcome the amendments that will remove the non-reversion policy for residential and small customers, thereby giving them the option of returning to Ergon Retail—the government owned retailer—but we note that this is not consistent with the policy change announced by Labor just prior to the last election. I will talk about the non-reversion policy and matters relating to electricity pricing in my own electorate of Southern Downs later in my speech.

The LNP members note that amendments to the Queensland legislation are required in order to remove barriers that prevent competition for embedded network customers and avoid conflict with the implementation of this major national reform in Queensland. We also note that the bill will create additional costs and administrative burdens on the owners of embedded networks. In that regard, we suggest that the government should have listened to stakeholders' concerns.

In common with many other bills, this bill was pushed through the committee stage quite quickly. There was no public hearing, which I think is very remiss considering the monumental impact that electricity policy has on everybody in this state—the families, the individuals, the pensioners, the small businesses, the farmers—

Mr Costigan: The little people.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Whitsunday. Electricity policy has an input into every aspect of our lives. The fact that the committee did not hold a public hearing on this bill is disappointing. Considering that this report has been available for quite some time before this second reading debate, it begs the question as to why there was the need to avoid a

public hearing. It cannot be that, because the bill was so urgent, it had to be rushed through the committee stage. I will leave the House and the wider audience who is watching me make this speech consider that point.

Government members interjected.

Mr LISTER: I can hear the interjections from members to my left. I wonder if they have ever been to Goondiwindi, Texas, Inglewood, Wallangarra, Toobeah, Bungunya, Weengallon, or to any of those other places in my electorate that are located along the Queensland-New South Wales border where the electricity is supplied by New South Wales.

When I hear government members talk in glowing terms about how this bill is going to make an improvement for all Queenslanders, I am here as proof positive to say that that is not true. People living in those areas, such as my constituents who run the pub at Talwood, or at Toobeah, or the sawmill at Inglewood, which is a big employer in my electorate, are paying way too much for electricity compared to their competitors elsewhere. It is a perverse incentive. It encourages businesses to leave the area. The Texas Motel and residents in the border town of Wallangarra, who recently approached me—

Mr Costigan: Billy Moore country.

Mr LISTER: Yes, I take the interjection from my honourable friend the member for Whitsunday—Billy Moore country.

Ordinary people, small business operators and larger business operators are tied to the New South Wales system. They do receive a token contribution from the state, supposedly to equalise their electricity bills, but they do not have the opportunity to revert to Ergon, they do not have the opportunity to avail themselves of the vital competition that will enable them to get a better deal on their electricity price.

As a result the ground on which they stand is cut away from Queensland, it is cut away from the interests of this government. Obviously if a person lives in Wallangarra, Texas, Inglewood, Goondiwindi, Bungunya, Weengallon, Toobeah or one of those areas they do not count in the eyes of this Labor state government. This Labor state government is happy for them to continue to pay extraordinarily high energy costs, which is having a depressive effect on industry in those areas and jobs and also on the mums and dads, the pensioners and the singles who have to pay for their air conditioning and who have to pay to pump water. What about the farmers in those areas who have to pump water for irrigation?

Mr Costigan: They are paying through the nose.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection. They are paying through the nose. We are already facing the possibility—it looks like the certainty—that this government will walk away from the special irrigation tariffs for those who have to pump water to produce food and fibre for the good of this country. The government's protestations that it is focused on development and growing the economy in Queensland are soft soap, they are flannel, they are press release material as they get on with the business of doing their union deals.

My honourable friend the member for Burleigh and other speakers spoke about how electricity policy in this state over long years has been used by the Labor Party as a secret tax. They load debt onto the generators and the poles and wires so they hide it from the state's bottom line. Then they have to charge more for electricity in order to be able to provide the extraordinary dividends that the government has demanded over long years. That is the secret tax that my colleagues have been talking about today.

My honourable friend the member for Pumicestone made a very revealing statement about the company which made a submission talking about the sale of the electricity interests, again by the Labor Party. It shows this suggestion that the Labor Party is the party of public ownership to be a complete sham. They have sold themselves into all shame when it comes to public assets.

I stress again that I have been in correspondence with the minister. I thank the minister for the courtesy and the promptness of his replies. I always enjoy his letters and some banter in the corridor with him, but so far he has not been able to address the concerns that I and the residents of Southern Downs have concerning their access to cheap reliable power. They are paying way above the odds.

When one lives that close to the Queensland border one would think that you would want everything on your side. You would think that this state would say, 'You're living on the frontier. We will make sure that you are not disadvantaged', but that is exactly what is not happening. We have consumers who have been living for far too long with way too high electricity prices. I emphasise that has a massive depressive effect on the economy, on jobs, on business investment and on production along the border with New South Wales, which is a very large part of my electorate. Other than that, the LNP does support the bill. I commend it to the House.